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DELL BOOK 9

Viña Delmar

Strangers in Love

Kathleen forsook all her traditions to follow a man she had known for less than a week

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DELL 10¢ BOOK

SOCIETY GIRL MARRIES SOCIAL NOBODY

STRANGERS IN LOVE

By Viña Delmar

Author of
"Bad Girl"
"Kept Women"
"Loose Ladies"

COVER PAINTING BY ROBERT STANLEY

Published by DELL PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC.,
261 Fifth Avenue, New York 16, N. Y. George T. Delacorte, Jr., President; Helen Meyer, Vice-President; Albert P. Delacorte, Vice-President. Designed and produced by Western Printing & Lithographing Co. Printed in U.S.A.

About the Author... Viña Delmar was born of theatrical parents and spent her infancy seeing America. Her formal education ended at the age of thirteen, and she began work on the stage at the age of sixteen with no notable success. Experience gained as a typist, switchboard operator, and assistant manager of a movie theater formed the nucleus from which emerged the straightforward tale of human relations and experience known as *Bad Girl*. The Literary Guild made this book one of its 1928 selections, and in 1930 it was dramatized. Several of her stories have been filmed. The titles of Viña Delmar's books are indicative of the frank portrayal of life at which she is so adept.

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Strangers in Love

SHE SAW HIM FIRST as she walked with difficulty, swaying from side to side, down the center of the train on her way to the observation car. The door of his stateroom was opened by the porter just as she passed, and she caught a glimpse of him sitting in dressing-gown and slippers watching with boredom the prairie miles slipping past his window. She walked on toward the observation car aware that the man whom she had seen for such a fleeting moment had awakened both her disapproval and her interest. Her disapproval because it was almost noon and he was not dressed, and because his expression showed that the vast distances beyond his window were not causing him to think respectfully of covered wagons and hardy, fearless men.

It was harder for her to know why he had aroused her interest. Of course, she told herself, he had a good face. That was an expression Mother always used when a person warranted a second glance. And it meant all sorts of things. Clean-cut collegians, hawk-nosed old men, wrinkled beldames, button-nosed babies, all could have good faces. The man in the stateroom was dark, lean, and hard, with curly black hair that had not yet been combed. Kathleen supposed that the ordinary run of girls would say he was attractive. But she wasn't the ordinary run of girls. She would say he had a good face.

She walked on toward the observation car feeling a small fluttering of pride at the sort of girl she was. It was

something to know that your outlook on life and your approach to everyday matters were well above average. Whether it was checking a trunk, making a complaint, or appraising a man glimpsed fleetingly, Kathleen was happily aware of her own ability to do it calmly, correctly, and confidently.

The morning papers were in the club car, and Kathleen sat down to see what was new in the world outside. She read of doings in Berlin, London, and Moscow and later of strikes, droughts, and floods in her own country, and when she was quite certain that nothing less than a sudden news flash could surprise her, she dutifully replaced the papers where the next interested passenger could find them.

She sat for a moment considering one thing and another that she had read, and wondering if Mother had met any interesting people on the boat. But of course she would. Mother always met interesting people. For Mother the world was a fascinating conglomeration of Philadelphians who had been raised in Tibet, gland specialists who were on the point of doing away with crime, young writers who were in the spiritual grip of Edgar Allen Poe, and engineers who needed only financial backing to span the world with a very practical and much-needed bridge. Mother attracted interesting people, Kathleen reflected. They were drawn to her by her sympathy and understanding. "Your mother is a very wonderful woman," people had often told Kathleen, and Kathleen, remembering, hoped that some day such a thing could be said of her.

And with the thought that on that far day she would have a child to whom these words could be said, Kathleen's mind now turned to Martin, who at this moment was probably thinking of her and of the train that was bringing her to him. It was a little amazing to think that in a few days she would be Martin's wife. Of course, she had known all through the last two years at college that soon-

er or later she would marry Martin, but even a month ago she had thought of her marriage as perhaps a year or so in the future. And then, all in a trice, Mother had had the opportunity to do Europe properly, and it seemed the sensible thing to give up the apartment and for Kathleen to go West and marry Martin.

After all, Martin had written, *you'll be alone there and I'm alone here, so why wait? True, I am not earning the salary now that I'll get next year, but we can manage, and we'll have an extra year together.*

Mother had bought Kathleen enough clothes to last her till "Martin's ship came in," had promised to come directly to Los Angeles after her European jaunt, and had disappeared amid a hubbub of boat whistles, screaming good-bys, and the good wishes of the interesting people who had come to see her off. Sailings made her forgetful.

At the last moment Mother had been tearful and apologetic. "I really ought to be at my only daughter's wedding, I know, but when Mrs. Withers invited me on this trip I couldn't resist. Just think—all of Europe, and it won't cost me a cent!"

Kathleen had laughed away Mother's twinges of conscience. "Of course, you had to accept, dear. You'd have been a fool not to. Now, don't get your eyes all red, and just go have a wonderful time."

So Mother had dried her tears, waved bravely, and been carried out to sea on the smartest ship afloat. The next day Kathleen had started in the opposite direction, and soon her new life with Martin would begin. She had thought very seriously about that life. She would have to work out a good, sensible budget, so that on Martin's modest income there would be provision made for all things, from recreations to the dire rainy day. But she was well accustomed to budgets. Mother's tiny income had to be coerced and bullied to allow for all they managed to get out of it. Martin's salary would prove just as elastic if cleverly handled.

There were her social contacts to think of, too. She had letters of introduction to a few earnest workers in worth-while organizations. Then, of course, there was her sorority chapter and a distant relative of Mother's whom she could seek out if she chose.

It occurred to her suddenly, as she sat there in the club car, that Mother and she had discussed every aspect of her married life so completely that she was facing her future without any doubts or tremors.

"Everything can be rationalized," Mother had said. "There is no excuse for civilized people having spats or even the mildest disagreements. Intelligent men and women can discuss anything and perceive immediately which of the two is holding the wrong opinion."

Kathleen appreciated how fortunate she was to have had all the risk taken out of marriage. Mother said that divorce was the escape of the ignorant and was absolutely unnecessary when the couple were able to talk things over calmly. "Intelligence takes the guesswork out of everything," Mother had said. "And, after all, marriage is but a job that each performs to the best of his or her ability. Like all jobs, the best worker gets the most reward."

That sounded a bit dreary, Kathleen thought. There must be something to marriage that couldn't be neatly catalogued under "i" for intelligence or "e" for efficiency. There must be an elusive quality, something great and nameless that wasn't even Mother's "spiritual side of the relationship." There must be something that words could not describe. Else, how could people endure eating, sleeping, breathing together for years on end and be tortured with grief when they were separated? There must be something that was tenderness and excitement. Something that was unstable as a will-o'-the-wisp, and yet dependable and sure.

If these things were not so, then why, for timeless eras, had people accepted marriage as the happy end-

ing to the story? And here she was, moving swiftly toward her happy ending. Martin and she as bride and groom. Martin and she as solid, settled people in the prime of life, Martin and she as aged, bowed figures celebrating their golden wedding. She tried to picture him as an old man, but he was so big and so vital that she could only envision a huge, white-haired gaffer skiing down a dangerous slope, whooping as he went. . . .

"Luncheon now being served in the dining-car!"

The call came simultaneously with Kathleen's realization that she was hungry. She was the sort of person who slept well on a train and retained her usual healthy passion for food at regular intervals. To have one's body resent the motion of train, ship, or plane seemed to her an affectation excusable only in the very young or the very old.

There were a few people already seated in the dining-car. A family at one of the larger tables. An elderly, sour-faced woman alone at a table for two. At another small table sat a man, and it was toward this table that the steward led Kathleen.

"Good afternoon, miss. Right this way, please." The chair was pulled out, the steward waited, smiling pleasantly, the man at the table had not turned his eyes from the bleak prairies, though boredom was still upon his face as he considered them.

Kathleen looked about her at the dozens of empty chairs, but the steward had fled to receive another party just entering. She knew full well that no shortage of tables had forced her into sharing this particular one, and in such an emergency the elderly, sour-faced woman would have logically become her luncheon companion. Kathleen gazed again at the man, but his eyes were still fixed upon the scenery beyond the window. He was so uninterested in her arrival that it couldn't be possible that— Besides, he had not looked at her as she had passed his stateroom door. She gave up the puzzle and

sat down.

"That's much better," the man said. "Even a pretty girl looks silly when she's of two minds."

"I've never been of two minds in my life. I intended to sit down. I was just wondering why you wanted me here."

He was unabashed. "I like the way you look. I wanted to know you. Of course, I had hoped to make all this less obvious. If you had come in later, when the crowd had gathered, things would have seemed more matter of fact. But no, you had to be hungry and dash in and spoil the whole effect of my plot."

She laughed. "I'm sorry. Really I am. Next time I'll be coy about everything. I won't even hint that I suspect an arrangement between you and the powers that be. Only, tell me how you even knew I existed. When I passed your stateroom, you didn't look—"

"A Miss Kathleen Manners. Traveling alone. Destination, Los Angeles," he said. Then, "I didn't look, eh?"

"I guess you did," she admitted. "I'm really terribly touched. What do I do to show my gratitude? Tip everybody, too, and worm information out of them, or will you make it easy?"

"John Virginia. Traveling alone. Destination, Los Angeles. . . . Are you going out to do picture work?"

"Heavens, no! I'm going out to be married."

"I'll try to remember that."

"Yes, do," she said smoothly. She picked up the menu card and studied it as carefully as though it were suspected of being a bogus first edition. He must see that she wasn't the least bit interested in him, that she had practically forgotten his presence. The waiter took their order and disappeared. Kathleen switched her study to the flat, frozen scenery. When he spoke she would be surprised that he was still there. That way she would show him that she wasn't the sort of girl who is impressed by tall, dark strangers, no matter how anxious

they were to know her.

He let five flat miles of scenery slip past before he spoke, and when he did it wasn't necessary for her to feign surprise: "Your intended—he's very athletic and big, blond, and handsome, isn't he? Terribly sure of himself. Works for his father—"

"His uncle," Kathleen corrected stiffly.

John Virginia shook his head. "I can't peg character like I used to," he said mournfully. "I was sure your man would work for his father. How could I have been so wrong?"

"I don't know," she said. "Maybe it's this ever-changing world that puts a body off." She spoke flippantly, but it disconcerted her to have a stranger classify her so perfectly that Martin could be described without an effort. She had prided herself on being an individual, and a rather superior one, at that. It irked her to think that perhaps the world was overrun with young women who prided themselves on being rather superior individuals. Were a million girls engaged to a million men like Martin? Were a million men working for older male relatives and dreaming wistfully of athletic triumphs in yesterday's collegian circles?

"You weren't so awfully clever about me," she said, after a time, more to reassure herself than to challenge him. "You thought I was an actress."

"What? When I asked you if you were going out for the pictures? . . . No, I knew you weren't. That was just another way of telling you that you're pretty and sweet and have oomph, or whatever they're calling it this week. It's all the compliments rolled into one. It's a short cut."

"That you've used often."

"Only on Los Angeles trains. It's no good anywhere else."

The waiter came, bearing the luncheon they had ordered. Kathleen busied herself pouring tea, a task of

considerable difficulty. When she had finished pouring she looked up, and found her companion's eyes fixed upon her.

"I wanted to know you," he said. "I really did, and I still want to. I realize, of course, that there's a certain amount of sparring to be done before a girl like you can accept easy companionship with a man she hasn't been introduced to. All I ask is that you'll tell me when we've done enough of it."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, yes, you do. You're not relaxed and at ease with me. You're full of suspicion and high-school persiflage and little falsities. You can relax. I don't want to hurt you; I only want to know you."

His directness left her with nothing to say except "But why?"

"Well, I'll try to tell you. You won't understand, but I'll tell you anyway. You ride to hounds. You stand in a field and let the wind blow through your hair. You sail a boat—"

"But I don't."

"I told you that you wouldn't understand."

"Oh." She nodded. "I see what you mean now. I created those pictures in your mind." She was silent for a moment. Then: "Thank you."

"It's something about your hair and your complexion and the way you carry yourself that made those pictures. I know that you're really not like them. You're regular, standard model with no extra equipment. A pretty girl with what they call an education." He spoke almost sadly. "Wrapped in cellophane from the cradle to the grave. None of the responsibilities of wealth; none of the hardships of poverty. Just peace, quiet, and the conventional pleasure, to be gained from conventional things. You're a nice girl, Kathleen Manners—amiable and well-bred. I'll bet you were a sensation on the campus."

She half rose from her chair. "Really, you know, you're very insulting."

He was amused. "Let me see. I said you were protected from the rigors of life, that you were well-bred and amiable and popular in college. Just where did the insult come in?"

"It was your tone."

"Oh," he nodded. "I'll be careful about that. Will you overlook it this once?"

She inclined her head coldly. After all, there was no sense in quarreling with a stranger whom she'd never see again.

They ate all their meals together, and it seemed he never tired of asking her about herself. Had he a passion for small talk, or was he intensely interested in the lives and customs of the conventional world in which he apparently had no part?

"Will you stay with Martin's people till the wedding?"

"No, Martin's uncle is a widower. I shall be at a hotel until the ceremony."

"The Ambassadress, no doubt."

"No doubt."

He shook his head. "God, it's incredible," he murmured. "You can't stay in the same house with Martin until you're married to him, which obviously implies that he is an untrustworthy beast."

"Oh, it does not. It's only that it wouldn't look well. I trust Martin."

"Of course, it wouldn't look well. Your friends take it for granted that you will throw yourself at Martin's head at the first opportunity. Your social laws must have been devised by a set of weasels."

"*My* social laws. I didn't devise them."

"Someone very like you did. Someone who was afraid of any road that has no signposts. You know what signposts are for, don't you?"

"Well, before meeting you, I'd have said yes, but I'm sure your definition will be very original."

"Not at all. Signposts are for people who are afraid of losing the way. I'm not afraid."

"Everyone's afraid of something," Kathleen told him.

"Granted, but it's the puny ones who are afraid of not following the signposts. Social laws are the same as criminal laws. They were made to protect the weak. A person who's smart enough to think of something the other fellow didn't think of is branded everything from a bad sport to a bandit."

She sat with a spoonful of cereal midway between her plate and her mouth. After a time she was able to speak. "I hope you haven't robbed a bank, John Virginia," she said quietly.

He shook his head. "No, and, by the way, no one calls me 'John.' I'm 'Johnny Virginia.' That sounds even more like rogues' gallery, but I was young and innocent when I got the name and it sounded different then."

She nodded. "It made pictures for you?"

"Yes."

"Riding to hounds and wind in the meadow?"

"That's right."

"What was your name before?"

"Your guess is as good as mine."

He was watching her, and she knew he sensed the foolish shock she had experienced upon hearing that the man who faced her at the breakfast table didn't know his name. It was with irony that he asked, "Would you care to hear more about me? I'm a very interesting fellow. That mother of yours would like me."

"I'm sure she would, Johnny."

"I'm sure she wouldn't. My story isn't up her alley. It's blood and hunger and dirt. I've never been to Vienna nor dug up hunks of pottery in Peru. All I've ever wanted was to get where I'd never be hungry and dirty and bloody again. I'm there now, but you can see

it isn't her type of story."

"Maybe not."

"Maybe it isn't even yours."

"I'd like to have a chance to judge that."

He shook his head. "I'll give you the high points. The dream I had of eating with silver off china plates, of mixing with nice people, of sleeping on good beds. I went and got those things, Kathleen."

"How?"

He reached across the table and picked up the morning paper which the waiter had brought him. He turned the sheets rapidly until he found what he wanted, then, folding the paper to a two-column size, he thrust it toward her. His likeness stared up at her from the newspaper, and it was with relief that she observed it was the sporting page.

Johnny Virginia brings Medicine Man West. Her eyes traveled rapidly down the printed page. *Medicine Man, mighty son of Tribal Custom, is on his way to prove Mr. Virginia's boasts about him either true or false. The four-year-old is fresh from his Eastern triumphs and is ready to meet all challengers on the West Coast.* Kathleen raised her eyes from the paper.

"Well," Johnny Virginia demanded. "Do you wish now that I had robbed a bank?"

"No, but I never imagined—"

"Oh, I know. People who race horses wear loud-checked suits and fake diamonds in their ties. Didn't you ever notice the vulgarity of the Vanderbilts, the Whitneys, the Riddells? They get that way from racing horses!"

"I know I'm ignorant. Don't rub it in. Only, I thought that men who did it for a business were—"

"I know what you thought. When we get to a stopover we'll walk back to the boxcar and I'll show you a thoroughbred. He can trace his line back two hundred years without finding an ancestor he's ashamed of. Damn'

few people can do that."

Later when she stood in the boxcar and looked at the sleek, long legs of Medicine Man, she was glad that Johnny had trained those legs to tick off the furlongs in record time. That was an achievement. She looked at Johnny with sudden respect. Anyone could buy a horse, but the man who made it a great horse had a knowledge, a gift that was not possessed by everyone. It did not surprise her to see that Johnny Virginia here in the boxcar was smiling a broad, boyish grin that changed his looks completely, that made him a new and charming person.

"Medicine Man's lead pony and companion," he said, pointing out a heavier, more solidly built animal. "His name is Squeegee. I've got other thoroughbreds coming later. Good platers— You know what platers are? Well, they run for cheaper purses. Medicine Man's my only star."

He stood talking first with her, then with the grooms, and she watched his hands move caressingly again and again toward the big horse as he talked. Before they left, Johnny stood for a moment with his face against the head of Medicine Man, and she couldn't be sure that Johnny hadn't kissed him.

They really love each other, she thought. *That man is sentimental. How strange that he should be.*

It was their last day on the train and Johnny ordered champagne for dinner. "We must celebrate our meeting, deplore our parting, and toast you and Martin."

They had the champagne, but there was no celebrating or toasting. They ate their dinner almost in silence and they did not sit so late tonight on the observation platform. She kept thinking of his hands stroking the graceful head of Medicine Man. Somehow his love for that horse had suddenly made a human being of Johnny Virginia. He had been an interesting person one met on a train, a harsh young man whose viewpoints had enlivened a dull trip, but now she was wondering about him.

What did he do for pastime? Who took care of him when he was ill? Had he ever been married? Was he often alone? What did he think?

She got to her feet suddenly. "I have a million belongings to gather together. I'd better go."

"Mind if I don't walk back with you?" he asked.

"No. I'll see you in the morning."

He shook his head. "I'll be busy in the boxcar in the morning."

She was disappointed. She had hoped to breakfast with him, to introduce him to Martin, to wring a promise from him that he would dine with them shortly.

"Well, good-by, then," she said. She put her hand out to him.

He did not seem to notice it. Instead, she found herself in Johnny Virginia's arms and he was kissing her.

She drew back from him sharply. "Johnny, I'm sorry you did that. It makes it impossible for us to ever meet again."

He was staring at the rushing rails ahead of them, bright and shining in the moonlight. "You had a big day, Kathleen Manners," he said to her. "You saw the greatest horse in training and you were kissed by a man. Now go to sleep, little girl. Good night and, incidentally, good-by."

Martin looked very big and blond and tanned in the California sunlight. She had not remembered him as being so collegiate in appearance. He crushed her in his arms and practically carried her to the car he had waiting at the curb.

"Hope you don't mind riding in this jallopy of mine. You simply have to have a car out here, and I'm afraid it'll be a year before I can afford one that'll be a thing of beauty instead of a joy forever."

"It's perfectly all right, Martin. Where are we going?"

"Home."

"Home?"

"Um-hum. Wait till you see it. Big as a bug's ear and every acre of it ours."

"You didn't buy a house, Martin?" she asked in sudden fear.

"What with? No, my bride, this is the smallest thing you've ever seen in the way of apartments, but it's ours. That is," he added thoughtfully, "it's yours till I move in after the wedding. Then it's ours."

"Martin, I've had no breakfast. Couldn't we stop somewhere for a cup of coffee?"

"Nope." He grinned gleefully, holding back a secret. "I knew you'd wait to have breakfast with me, and so I prepared for that emergency. I've got a woman in our apartment right now stacking up wheat cakes and permeating the atmosphere with the fragrance of good coffee."

"A woman?" she asked dully.

"Yes, my sweet; your slave, your faithful attendant who will work herself to the bone for you until next Monday, and then you're on your own."

Kathleen couldn't laugh. The sleepless night, the admissions she had wrung from herself made life no laughing matter. It was all going to be so difficult.

The apartment consisted of a room that one dined in and lounged in. It had beds concealed in the wall, so that by night one also slept in the room. There was a tiny kitchenette, a tiny bath, and from one window there was a view of the community swimming-pool. From the other one could see a street lined with palm trees.

"This was a furnished apartment, but I made them take the junk out and I bought our own stuff. If you don't like it, it can all be exchanged."

"It's beautiful, Martin."

"It's Swedish Moderne," he said helpfully.

The woman Martin had engaged was elderly and silent. She put an excellent breakfast upon the table, and

went out. Kathleen thought of Mother as she began to speak, and she felt a wave of bitterness sweep over her at Mother's glib assurance that everything should be rationalized. How would Mother like to rationalize catching Martin in the middle of a smile and dealing him an undeserved blow?

"Martin."

"Yes, dear." Very brightly, very innocently.

She looked away from him. "Martin, on the train coming out here I met a man. I'll skip the details. They're not shameful, but they're unnecessary. I'll come directly to the point. I met him, and now I couldn't possibly consider marrying you."

Martin's voice, when it came, was very low and had a funny, choked sound to it: "You mean you want to marry him?"

"There's no question of my marrying him. I'll never even see him again. We made no plans for future meetings. We said good-by. When we separated we each believed that I was going to marry you. Then, somewhere in the night, I saw that I couldn't marry you feeling the way I do about him. It wouldn't be fair or sensible."

"But if you're not going to see him, Kathie, you'll get over feeling as you do about him. Look, isn't it just possible that it's the kind of crush we've all had a million times?"

"Martin, do you think a girl ought to be susceptible to crushes when she's practically walking up to the altar?"

"I don't know." He shook his head despairingly and got to his feet. He looked very huge in the tiny apartment and very pathetic. "Why did this have to happen? Who is he, Kathie? Anyone I'd know?"

She walked to the window and stood gazing down upon the swimming-pool. "You wouldn't know him, Martin."

"Kathie, we've been friends for years and loved each

other most of that time. How could someone whom you only knew for a few days upset all that?"

"I don't know."

"It isn't possible, Kathleen. What's he like?"

"Like no one either of us ever knew before, Martin."

Martin took a package of cigarettes from his pocket and nervously lighted one. "Your description of him is very meager," he said, "yet on the other hand it is very enlightening. Maybe because he's different he sort of appealed to you in an unimportant way. I mean, like a woman falls in love with a character in a book or an actor on the screen."

"That could be, Martin, but I have to be certain."

"Of what? The point you're trying to make is muddled, dear. Whether you're in love with this man or not, he's gone out of your life. Is that true?"

She nodded.

"All right, then. Suppose you find you love him?"

"Then I couldn't possibly marry you. I'd rather have my unhappiness alone than drag you into it, too." She dropped wearily back into her chair at the table.

"All right. Then let's take the other side. Suppose you find you don't love him?"

She did not answer at once. She sat folding her napkin into the smallest possible squares and seeming to wonder at its flexibility. When he repeated his question, she said, "Whether I love him or not doesn't matter. Could I love you and still call our wedding off?"

"Maybe you're right, Kathie."

"I'm sorry, Martin. Sorry for everything."

Presently she left him standing alone in the tiny home he had furnished for her.

She climbed into a taxicab and mentioned the only name in Los Angeles with which she was familiar: "Ambassadress Hotel."

At first she thought she would be able to throw herself upon the bed and sleep for hours. Rest and surcease

from remembering Martin's eyes was what she needed more than anything in life. But she could not sleep. When she was not seeing the disappointment upon Martin's face, she was seeing the way Johnny Virginia held his cigarette, the way he looked at her, the way he had kissed her.

She thought of Mother, and for a moment dreamed of flying east, catching a boat, and walking in unexpectedly to say, "I'm so miserable, Mother. There's a man named Johnny Virginia—"

But she knew that, for once, Mother would fail her.

Suddenly a bell was shrilling and she sat bolt upright on the bed. The room was dark and she was suddenly, unaccountably terrified. It took her a few seconds to reassemble her senses. She had fallen asleep. She found a light and flooded the room with a soft, shadowy pinkness and reached for the phone. "Yes?"

"Miss Manners?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Virginia is here."

"Mr. Virginia!"

The clerk did not appear to notice her amazement. "He asked me to say that he's in business clothes, so please don't dress for dinner."

"What! Oh—er—yes. Thank you. Thank you very much."

She stood dazedly holding the receiver in her hand. Was this part of the dream? Mr. Virginia is here. He had said good-by because she was going to marry Martin. . . . But he was waiting to take her to dinner. . . . How could she know whether or not she truly loved Martin if Johnny Virginia was going to continue to cast his curious spell upon her? Or did she already know?

Johnny Virginia was standing at the elevator waiting for her. "Good evening," he said. "You look rested. Did you have a nap?"

"Yes, and I have a question, too."

"Mine comes first. Have you any preferences about dinner?"

"None in the world."

They were in a taxicab before he let her ask her question.

"Now," Kathleen demanded, "why on earth did you suppose that I would have dinner with you?"

"You're going to, aren't you?"

"Yes," she said humbly. "I'm disgustingly transparent, aren't I? You knew exactly how I felt, didn't you?"

"Don't let that trouble you, Kathleen. The better the horse, the truer to form he runs."

"People aren't horses."

"That's a shrewd observation, dear, and one not easily challenged, but here you are, just as I knew you'd be."

"Johnny, why did you come back? Are you playing a game? Are you trying to see how far you can lead me from the neat little path I was walking when I got aboard that train?"

He tossed his cigarette upon the floor of the cab and stamped it out angrily. "Yes, that's it. I'm playing a game. And I'm good at it, too. When you walked past my stateroom I saw right away that to know you for a day or two would leave me hungry the rest of my life, so I cleverly tipped everybody in sight so that I would get to know you. Then I talked to you, and said to myself, 'She's not for you. She'd be a millstone around the neck of any man who didn't have a job with his uncle and a fund of stories about his frat house,' and then, with fiendish adroitness, I went crazy about the silly way you comb your hair and the way you laugh. Sure, I'm playing a game and, if I win, I'll get a girl I should never have looked at."

He turned from her and gazed moodily out the window of the cab.

She reached for his hand. "Did you know that you

meant enough to me so that I'd scatter all the well-planned years of my life to the winds?"

"When I kissed you I knew a lot of things. I knew that I was cheating you out of a swell, easy life and cutting myself in for a pack of trouble. When I walked into the hotel tonight I said to myself, 'Five gets you ten, she couldn't go get that license.' And I knew I was licked, whether you had or you hadn't."

She smiled into the hard, lean face of Johnny Virginia. "Aren't you afraid you'll turn my head with such romantic beseechings?"

"Do you have to have romantic talk, Kathleen? You've had all the hero stuff you're going to get from me."

"When was that?"

"When I gave you a square break on the train. I gave you a chance to get away from me. I said good-by and let you see Martin again. Do you think that was nothing? I wanted to get a promise from you, but I gave you an even break. I let you walk out and kiss your big, blond athlete and listen to him for a while and then make your decision."

"And I made it. I had to hurt him, and I assure you that wasn't easy."

"I know. I looked at him from the train window."

"Johnny, it wasn't anyone's fault."

"That's propaganda, sweetheart. There's propaganda for everything, and when two people get together and give a third one a hell of a deal it's easy to say it's no one's fault. That makes love noble, see? But Martin got a deal from the bottom of the deck. If you'd ever considered him you'd have shied away from me the minute you knew that I interested you. So that's that. Let's just keep the record straight."

"You look at everything so strangely."

"Maybe I just look at it clearly."

"Maybe. Oh, Johnny, I'm so in love with you that I've thrown over everything I know about and I feel I'm in

a different world entirely. I feel small and weak and uncertain for the first time in my life. Will you promise me something, Johnny? Will you try to understand me a little?"

"Why the hell do you suppose I asked you all those questions on the train? I wanted to see what made you tick, so that I would understand you, and I'll do my best to make you happy; but I'm no stuffed shirt, Kathleen, and I have no little book of directions that tells me what to do under any given circumstance."

"I won't complain."

"I wonder. You know, kid, you can't look my past performances up in the *Racing Form*. You don't know anything about me."

"I know that I love you, Johnny."

He kissed her then, and there was in his kiss the tenderness, sincerity, and assurance that she could never find in his words, no matter how hard she tried.

She married Johnny Virginia just as conventionally and legally as she had intended to marry Martin, but when she wrote to Mother she asked to have her letters addressed to "Miss Kathleen Manners." *I joined a club here of young married women who, in an effort to preserve their individuality, are clinging to their maiden names,* she lied in her first letter.

That was one nice thing about Mother. She could understand and appreciate any eccentricity if only it was in the by-laws of some club.

Johnny meticulously balanced a half-dollar on the top of a pencil and did not look at her as she made her explanations. "After all," she said, "it's my life and not Mother's, and I'm perfectly justified in marrying the man I prefer, but it was all so lightning-fast and surprising that it isn't easy to tell about it in a letter. I'll wait till she gets here."

"I'd write it if I were you. You won't be able to hear

her yell with an ocean and a continent between you."

"It's only that letters are so unsatisfactory, Johnny. The minute she gets here, I'll proudly present you to her. When she sees you, explanations will be easy."

"And, in the meantime, you might explain to the management why the lady who is sharing this apartment with me is Miss Kathleen Manners."

"I already did. I carried it off beautifully. I said, with amazing nonchalance, 'Oh, by the way, letters addressed to "Miss Manners" are for me. I'm retaining my professional name.' "

"They hear that one a dozen times a week, but, if you don't care, neither do I."

She colored. "Johnny, if you think for one minute that those people downstairs are believing that I am a common, ordinary—"

"And if they do, sweetheart, then what? Will you throw all caution to the winds and actually tell Mother that you're Johnny Virginia's wife?"

She hesitated for a moment, and he said, "Between two evils, always choose the lesser. By all means let the management think what they wish."

"But they can't think anything uncomplimentary. Everyone's so nice and respectful."

"At these prices, honey, their respect comes natural."

She looked around the apartment they had rented and was forced to acknowledge that he might be right. Not that she knew exactly what it cost. Johnny wasn't a man to discuss finances. There was no budget that had to be balanced, no little economies to be practiced. He had said, "The Spanish Gardens have nice apartments," and so they had moved into the first one the superintendent had shown them. It had a huge living-room, furnished in gleaming white with touches of red and a soft, sandy shade for chairs and carpets. There was a fireplace and a door opening upon a roof garden that was for their private use. Two elaborately dressed bedrooms, two

bathrooms, and no kitchen at all. The apartment was a luxurious sophisticate that resembled the tiny room done in Swedish Moderne as little as Johnny Virginia resembled Martin.

The clothes that Kathleen had brought to last till Martin's ship came in did not adjust themselves to her life with Johnny. They had been intended for those months of waiting on the shore peering into the distance watching for the ship.

Life was a curious, disordered pattern that called for nothing but negligees, dinner clothes, and the smartest of spectator apparel.

"I've never seen a horse race, Johnny."

"Would you like to?"

"Of course. It's your business. I want to know about it. I want to understand you when you speak of it. I want to know what's good and what's bad—"

"It's good when your horse wins."

"Is that the only thing to hope for?"

He shook his head. "There's something else to hope for. It's the hope that your horse will run a good race. Sometimes they come in fifth, or even worse, but you glow with satisfaction because you saw something the chance observer didn't see. You saw the courage it took to get that fifth spot. You saw the horse had heart and that now it's up to you to show him how to use it."

"I like your business when you talk like that, Johnny."

But she didn't like it when she heard him moving about his room in the damp chill of the California morning. It would still be dark, and a glance at the illuminated face of her bedside clock would show her that he had had no more than two hours' sleep. He would be on his way now to the barns to do the mysterious things with which he filled the early morning hours. By ten o'clock he was back again to kiss her awake and to sleep exhaustedly a few hours during which she breakfasted, read the papers, and sometimes went shopping.

After his sleep Johnny was ready to go back to the track. On days when she went with him she sat beside him beautifully groomed, enchantingly attired.

She had learned at once that he wanted her to dress so that all the world would say, "That's Johnny Virginia's wife. Doesn't she dress gorgeously?" And Kathleen never discussed the matter with him, but went quietly about the business of buying only the best and smartest clothes. . . . "This just came in, Mrs. Virginia, so I called you right away. Two hundred and ten dollars, but isn't it smart?" And Kathleen would buy it because she understood that it took Johnny another milestone away from that youth of his which had been smeared with dirt and blood and hunger.

And when she sat beside him at the race track she was as unsmiling as he and no emotion ever reflected itself upon her face, and no one attempted to make friends with the silent, unfriendly Virginias.

Johnny had taught her about that: "I'm an owner-trainer, sweetheart, so I'm supposed to know more than the horse. Be friendly, and people'll pester the hell out of you about who's going to win. If we knew, we could make a million dollars every afternoon, but the dopes don't seem to realize that. Never root for the horse you've bet on. Don't let people around you know which you picked."

"Why not, Johnny?"

"Because I'm an owner-trainer. If the horse loses, then I was pretty dumb to have thought he'd win. If he wins, then the yokels say the race was crooked, because Johnny Virginia bet on the horse, which proves he knew it was going to win. Just sit there dead-pan and let them wonder."

After the races, they would go back to the apartment and Johnny would sleep again. When he rose the evening started. Dinner and dancing and a peek in at the gambling houses.

"Johnny, we don't have to do the town every night. Look, why don't we fit our lives to your needs? Why don't we go to bed very early, so that you don't have to sleep in fits and starts?"

"I've lived like this all my life, Kathleen. An eight-hour sleep all in one piece would kill me."

She had so much to learn about this husband of hers. He had been a stranger when she married him. Now she knew things about him which piqued her curiosity and which she felt would baffle her forever. Where had he learned to dance so beautifully, so faultlessly? Whence came his taste for good, conservative clothes? But there were things about him that she definitely knew. Things about him that were good to know. He never drank too much, never gambled too heavily, and his quiet voice never changed pitch, no matter how annoyed he became.

Often, as she sat reading the sporting page, her cheeks burned at references to Johnny's business methods. She wished that the public could meet him, could know that he wasn't a loud, vulgar, tinhorn gambler as the papers subtly hinted.

"Johnny, is Medicine Man trained to delay the start?"

"Oh, reading the sporting page again?"

"It says here that Medicine Man behaved so badly at the post that the start was delayed five minutes, and Many Hearts, who was carrying top weight, was tired out before he began to run. They seem to think that Medicine Man acted up with malice aforethought. Johnny, is that quite fair?"

"Look, sweetheart, the guy who owns Many Hearts inherited ten million dollars when his father died. Horse racing to him is an amusing little game and not a life's work. He signs checks and watches his horses run. I work for what I get, and I'll be damned if he's ever going to win a purse from me while I can stop it."

"But—"

"But, listen. I'm smart enough to figure out a way to

win. The guy who owns Many Hearts couldn't win anything but the moron sweepstakes if it was up to him to do any thinking."

"Still, Johnny, it isn't right to—"

"What isn't right? Being smarter than the next guy? Get this clear, Kathleen—I'm not crooked. I'm only using my head. You can be ashamed of me and look at me with swimming eyes, like you're looking at me now, if you ever hear that I'm giving my horses dope or using batteries on them, but that you'll never hear. I'm straight and strictly on the up and up, but I have to think, not guess, in this game."

"You're right, Johnny." Mother would have liked that conversation. Everything had been rationalized.

Sometimes she wondered what Mother would think of Rickey McAvoy. Rickey was twenty-four, but he looked ten years younger. He was Medicine Man's jockey. A small, slight, red-haired kid who came from a Middle Western farm, with the freshness of the rural life still upon him after three years on the important race tracks. Johnny had found him mounted on plugs at a local fair and had taught him to ride for the big money.

Kathleen could never convince herself that Rickey was a man. His build, his engaging smile, his childish worship of Johnny, made him seem to her a boy, adrift in a hostile world.

"Look," Johnny said one night. "Rickey's dropping by with his girl for a drink. Don't send out for ice cream, and it really isn't awfully cute of him to have a girl, as you were just about to say."

"But he's so boyish. It isn't just his build. He has that well-scrubbed look like nice little fellows have."

"I know, dear, but he'll be quite happy with a whisky and soda. He won't resent our being out of lollipops. After all, don't forget he's a year or so up on you."

She never saw Rickey McAvoy astride a horse flying down the stretch that she didn't marvel at his courage

and ability. He was such a little boy, and there was so much to marvel at in this new, strange world of thundering hoofs, gowns from Paris, and rare smiles from a dark, intriguing stranger whom she adored.

"Will we be back in Los Angeles or vicinity in about four months?" she asked, looking up from Mother's letter.

"Yes, ma'am," Johnny responded. "We're coming back to watch Medicine Man pick up fifty thousand dollars."

"That'll be all right, then," she said, paying no attention to Medicine Man's bright prospects. She was well accustomed now to figures that ran by fives and sixes. "Mother will be here in July."

Johnny's dark, direct gaze caught her eyes and held them. "Honey, what will you do if she says you've made a dreadful mistake?"

"She won't say that, darling."

"You've answered my question so completely that I'll never have another doubt, Kathleen." His voice was hard with irony and he walked into his bedroom, where a moment later she could hear him opening and closing his bureau drawers, giving one last look for forgotten belongings.

They were leaving Los Angeles and the lovely apartment to seek other fields. The race track outside the town was sleeping now. The season was over for the gay, excited throngs of spectators, but for the horses and their retinues it meant travel and another campaign in a new, strange territory. And it meant more lies to Mother. Well, maybe not exactly lies. She was careful not to mention Martin's name in letters, but: *We are leaving Los Angeles on business. I'll let you know the new address as soon as we're settled. I'm divinely happy and disgustingly healthy. Hope you're having as good a time as your letters suggest you are . . .*

Mother would be picturing Martin running some

business errand for his uncle and taking his little wife along with him. Kathleen could see the letter being passed across a table in Bucharest, with Mother saying, "Those kids are just insanely in love with each other, and so happy."

You could forget what Mother was saying if you kept very busy shopping and dancing and scouring the new city for an apartment as lovely as the one they'd left behind in Los Angeles. "The apartments are so drab here, Johnny. I've seen nothing you'd like except, of course, that house—"

"We'll take it," he said.

"But don't you see what that will cost us for our two months here?"

He shook his head. "I'm no good at figures. I just like the house."

It was furnished in antiques, and the bed linen was snowy white and soft, with elaborate monograms. Kathleen said nothing further. God alone knew on what strange pallets Johnny had curled himself on the march toward this triumph. He brought Rickey to live with them in the house, because there was plenty of room, and Kathleen learned something more about her husband: He played an expert game of golf.

"Where did you learn, dear?" she asked as she walked with him and Rickey toward the clubhouse for luncheon.

"Oh, I just fooled around with it."

"Well, that was nice of him to teach you, wasn't it? And such a busy man, too."

Rickey burst out laughing. "You're getting to talk like the boss, Kathleen. That's the kind of things he says when you give him a run-around answer."

"I know it is. I wanted to see how he'd like it."

Johnny looked a little sheepish. "I was a caddy once," he said. "I couldn't carry those bags around all day without wondering what was the sense in carrying them, could I? I'd see people work themselves into a frenzy

because the ball wouldn't go where they wanted it to. I had to see whether it was as important as they made out."

"And so you got to be an excellent player," Kathleen said. She looked at Rickey. "What do you say? Shall we accept his explanation?"

"Guess we'll have to. If we don't, he'll give us another one, and then we won't know where we are. Did you ever ask him how he started with horses?" Kathleen shook her head. "Well, don't, unless you want to get so confused you'll never straighten yourself out."

Kathleen grinned. "You know he might do that, Rickey, to discourage questioning. Do you think that could be it?"

"You're damn' right that's it," answered Johnny. "Why do people always have to know the wherefore? Here I am and here's what I do, and what difference does it make what went before? Come on; we'll eat lunch and ask the waiter how he learned to be a bus boy."

"Rickey, we've been squelched."

"But by such a swell guy," Rickey said.

And Kathleen felt a warm, comfortable wave of happiness engulf her. It was nice to hear Johnny called a swell guy. She got pretty tired of having the papers refer to him as the too clever Mr. Virginia. His losses were always coups that went wrong. His wins were always sharp practice. But to little Rickey McAvoy Johnny was a swell guy, and Kathleen wanted to hug the jockey for the feeling he bore for Johnny.

"What weight will they deal us in the Pemberton Mile, Boss?" Rickey asked when they were seated at the table.

"More than we'll take without fighting."

"Fighting'll get us nowhere. The best horse packs the most weight. That's what we have to figure on."

They're happy, she thought. *We're three happy people sitting down to a feast. None of us lacks anything we need*

at this moment. Johnny never meant it when he said I'd be a millstone. I've given him happiness. I'm sure I have. And she wished that she could walk into his arms right there in the club and tell all the surprised diners that they were looking at a woman who was superbly, deliriously happy.

And all at once she was conscious that the men were no longer talking of the Pemberton Mile. A silence had fallen and Johnny was sitting just looking into her face.

"I hope you take this right, Kathleen," Rickey said. "It's really a swell compliment, though I admit it sounds kind of funny. The boss is looking at you just like he looks at Medicine Man."

"That is a swell compliment, Rickey." She smiled across at Johnny, and miraculously he smiled back.

Medicine Man lost the Pemberton Mile by a head. He was beaten by a three-year-old colt that had been allotted a featherweight because he was running against older, thoroughly seasoned contenders. Kathleen suffered, reading the newspaper accounts of the race. It was plain that the sporting gentry liked to see Johnny defeated.

"What do they mean?" she demanded, throwing the paper angrily upon the floor. " 'Medicine Man could not withstand the gallant drive of little Cambric.' Gallant was he, with Medicine Man carrying more weight than an interstate bus?"

Johnny nodded solemnly. "Yes, he was gallant, and make no mistake about it. It takes something most humans haven't got to keep on trying when failure seems inevitable."

"Oh, I know, Johnny. I respect Cambric's gameness, but why do the papers always act as though beating you is a triumph shared by all?"

"Because it's the sport of kings, and smart peasants aren't welcome."

"That can't be true. I've seen dozens of owners who

are practically mugs, darling, who are in debt and who look half-starved."

"Yes, and what horses do they have? Thousand-dollar haybags. I'm the only guy in the business with a top-flight horse who isn't making a pleasant pastime of racing."

"But people can't hate you for that."

"Maybe not, but there's something vulgar about a man to whom winning is financially important. It isn't wearing the old school tie and all that sort of thing."

Kathleen looked back at the paper. "Johnny," she said softly, "suppose we had a child? How would we explain to him the position you hold in the racing world?"

"The way I've tried to explain it to you. I can only hope he grasps the idea more quickly. You seem to think I ought to be ashamed when I win."

"No, dear, but there is such a thing as being too smart."

"Not when it's your living. Hell, Kathleen, I could be a great sport if I was doing this for fun. Just because there are bands playing and bright colors and pretty girls screaming you seem to think it's a friendly little get-together of equine athletes. It isn't—it's the only way I know to make a living. And when we have that son you're talking about, I'll be awful sore if you cram his head with collegian ideals."

She was stung into making a reply that she regretted immediately: "No, dear. I'll teach him to keep his horse acting up at the gate, to lose three races in a row, so that the impost will be light when the big handicap is run, to—"

"Okay, kid. But give me a break. Because my ideas are different than yours they're not necessarily wrong. You're living on the theory that life is one big garden party full of ladies and gentlemen playing games according to a book of rules. I claim it's a battle royal and you have to be a man to stay on your feet. And if you're ashamed

to have your son read about me in the papers, then your marriage was sure a major error."

She struggled with her tears. Yes, this was what he had meant by a millstone. A woman who would want to interfere with the habits of a lifetime, who would find fault, who would cry. "Johnny, I'm an awful fool. Forgive me. We're so happy together that it's criminal to look around for things to complain about. I don't want to be a nuisance to you. I want to make those pictures for you forever. Remember? I was riding to hounds and sailing a boat and letting the wind blow through my hair?"

"I remember, Kathleen. You'll always be like that to me. I'm just as sentimental as the gypsy horse trader was. You know about him, of course." She shook her head and he recited the poem for her, looking a little amused at his childishness:

"He'd sold a score of horses
And he'd kissed a hundred girls,
And some were second-raters
But some were rare as pearls.
And the lass he finally married,
She was very sweet and fair,
And he loved her for her likeness
To a wild and clean-limbed mare."

Kathleen laughed. "I've heard everything now."

"Oh, there's more to it that I've forgotten. It goes on to say how she never knew that in his mind she was loyal, courageous, and strong and full of fine equine virtues. You see, she made pictures for him, too."

"Cute."

"Yes, very. At the end he murders her for falling short of a mare's perfections."

"Oh, dear, I do hope you'll never expect too much of me."

"I won't. I think I know you. I'll never be rudely shocked like the gypsy lad. I know my wife."

"And what do you think of her, Johnny?"

He took her hand and drew her more closely to him. "Well, I'll tell you what I think of her. Of course, I know a gentleman doesn't discuss his wife with other women, but not having that handicap I can speak freely. . . . She's a very pretty girl. Much on your type. Perhaps that's the strange appeal you have for me."

"Oh, very pretty doesn't mean anything. What is she really like?"

"Now, look, must we talk about my wife? Here we are all alone, and I don't have to be home till dinnertime. Couldn't we sort of—?"

"Sir! How dare you! If my husband were here you wouldn't dare—"

"Oh, wouldn't I? Right before his very eyes I'd do this." He swept her into his arms and kissed her, and none of the playfulness of his mood was in that kiss.

Kathleen had never been cynical enough to believe that caresses grew uninteresting after marriage, but she was always surprised to find that the excitement of Johnny's first kiss could be rekindled every time he chose.

"I love you, Kathleen. I wonder if you know how much."

"Of course I—"

"You couldn't. You couldn't know what it means to me to look at you and know that you're mine. You're sweet and good and beautiful, and never in my life have I been so completely happy. It's because of you. All this"—he waved a careless hand at the elegant room—"I worked for. But no man could work hard enough to deserve the happiness you've given me."

"Why, Johnny." She looked at him, her eyes bright with the joy his unexpected words had brought her. She could think of nothing to say that would make him see

what they meant to her. So she kissed him and hoped that would tell him something of what she felt.

The tenderness of the moment was shattered. The maid came to the door with a parcel. "Something for you, Mrs. Virginia."

Kathleen looked with interest at the unexpected package. "Oh, it's from Mother. I wonder what it is."

"Shall we sit around guessing or shall we open it?"

"Fool—hand me the paper-knife. It's from Holland. Would it be tulip bulbs, do you suppose?"

"Doesn't look like a windmill."

Kathleen plowed through the acres of paper in which the gift was wrapped, and emerged with a small blue pitcher that said "Souvenir of Zuyder Zee" upon its small blue side. There was a note:

Darlings, think of me when you are having your Sunday morning breakfasts and remember that it won't be long now before I'm with you.

He took the pitcher and stood it upon the antique buffet, where it looked startlingly out of place. "There," he said, "just what we've been needing; a touch of color. It lends class, too. It'll make people think we've been to the Fair."

"Johnny, you're perfectly hateful about everything that has to do with Mother."

"I was only fooling, Kathleen. It's a wonderful pitcher."

When they got back to Los Angeles they were able to rent the same apartment they had had before. Kathleen walked into it with the feeling of coming home. The exquisite house in the East and the hotel suites they had left behind them were all right, but to this apartment she had come on her wedding night. Here she had grown to know and to trust the stranger she had married.

"Good to be back, isn't it, Johnny?"

"Swell. I almost wish we could stay a while, but we'll

have to be in Saratoga for August."

"Saratoga!"

"Sure, Saratoga. Why not?"

"Oh—" She laughed in sudden relief. "I'd forgotten that by August Mother will know anyhow. I won't have to explain away a Saratoga address."

He shook his head slowly. "Of course, I could have them build a race track in a nice, quiet little town so Mother would never guess the truth," he said; "or I could go join the Foreign Legion—"

"You don't understand, Johnny!"

"Well, if I don't, then I've forgotten all I ever knew about human behavior, and there are those who'll tell you I once knew quite a lot on that fascinating subject."

"When Mother comes I'll show you that I—"

But he had picked up the newspaper and seemed to have forgotten Mother. As a matter of fact, for the next few weeks he seemed to have forgotten everything except Medicine Man and preparations for the important race that meant fifty thousand dollars to the winner. There were a half-dozen owners all confident that their horses would step into the charmed circle when the race was run. Johnny made no extravagant statements. He only grew more preoccupied, more highly keyed as the day approached. He spent longer hours at the barns, and Kathleen knew that those hours were not hard, exhaustive work now, but instead the satisfied pleasure of the artist who steps back to admire the finished canvas. The masterpiece need only be guarded now, protected from deterioration until put on exhibition. She saw that both Johnny and Rickey were full of the deep, smoldering excitement that Medicine Man could inspire. She tried to make herself small, not intrude too far into this world that had been built for two men and a big, bay colt.

She wished desperately that there was something that could absorb her time and her thoughts so completely.

Something that would keep her busy, stop her from wondering when the cable was coming that would announce Mother's departure from Europe or the telegram that would say she had already started west from New York. Not that it mattered what Mother thought of Johnny. But breaking the news to her—that was not pleasant to think about.

On the morning of the big race Kathleen awakened with the sudden, chill shock of being alone in a room and feeling that someone had touched her shoulder. She sat bolt upright in bed, and felt her heart pound with a sudden, strange panic. She looked at the clock and saw that it was almost eleven. Where was Johnny? And then she remembered that this was the big day and that he had planned to stay out at the track from early morning on. That accounted then for the peculiar actions of her heart and the cold, prickly feeling in her spine. It was excitement over the race. Or was it an inexplainable hunch that had come to her in her sleep?

She climbed out of her bed and reached for her negligee. Then she heard the bell ring, and she was sure that it had rung before. That was it. The bell. It had penetrated her sleep without her conscious mind knowing it had rung. She glanced at the clock. Perhaps it was her breakfast. But surely they'd wait till she telephoned. They always had before.

"Yes?" she demanded through the closed door.

"Yes yourself," came back a hearty, happy voice that was terribly familiar.

And the next moment Kathleen was crushed to her mother's bosom.

"I wanted to surprise you, darling," Mother cried. "Thank heavens, you were home. How are you, child? How I've missed you. Stand back. Let me take a look at you." Kathleen stood back. "You look wonderful. You can't be ill, but you're not dressed. Is it the climate that makes you lazy? How do you stand this heat?"

"Oh, it's not so bad. I was up rather late last night and I was catching up on lost sleep."

Mother advanced into the living-room, taking in every detail with quick, snapping eyes. "You certainly have a place here, baby. How is Martin?"

There it was, right in her lap. The moment had come. But had it, after all? Mother hadn't her hat off yet. Surely later, when chatter had subsided into good, solid conversation, would be better.

"Oh, he's fine."

"The rascal never wrote me a line. I thought he'd at least answer my letter."

Kathleen swallowed hard. "Oh, did you write him?" she asked.

"Didn't he tell you? I guess he took my words too literally. I told him the letter was just for him and I sent it to his office. It was just a heap of instructions on how to take care of my baby and wishing him happiness. You know the sort of thing."

Kathleen nodded. Poor Martin!

"Well, here I am!" Mother hadn't changed an iota. She was still as bright and unwrinkled as a marble. Five pounds overweight, perhaps, but that always happened when she was enjoying herself. "Tell me, have you room for me here? Or shall I go to a hotel?"

"There's an extra bedroom," Kathleen said.

"You have two bedrooms? My, what dash! Do they give apartments away in Los Angeles?"

"Not exactly."

"But Martin got his raise before you were married. I can see that. Why didn't you tell me? Your letters were awfully dull. They sounded like weather reports for Los Angeles and vicinity."

Kathleen smiled weakly. "How was Europe?" she asked.

"Wonderful. Let's have a spot of coffee, dear, and I'll tell you what happened in Rumania. You'll be thunder-

struck."

Kathleen rose, and Mother followed, thinking that she would sit chatting while breakfast was prepared. But Kathleen was only on her way to the telephone.

"What would you like, Mother, a regular breakfast?"

"Heavens, no! I breakfasted three hours ago. I just want coffee. Haven't you any in the kitchen?"

Kathleen shook her head.

"What, no coffee!"

"No coffee, Mother, and no kitchen."

"No kitchen!"

Mother's reaction was so startling that Kathleen wondered if she had said "No Martin" instead of no kitchen. Mother's eyes doubled in size, and disapproval emanated from her like a wave of heat.

"Kathleen, I think your way of living is the silliest I've ever seen. Two bedrooms and no kitchen. I thought I told you what kind of an apartment to choose before you left New York."

"Martin had already chosen an apartment by the time I got here," she said with utter truth.

"Then he's absolutely crazy."

Kathleen let that go unchallenged. Mother got up and began to explore the premises. She looked into Kathleen's bedroom, and said, "Influence of movie stars hits bride on modest income. Gracious, Kathleen, this is really awful! All that satin and lace. And when I think about the Chinese orphans—"

"Oh, Mother, the apartment isn't big enough for them."

"You wouldn't be so flip if you'd been hearing what I've been hearing," Mother said darkly.

After Mother had had her say about two bathrooms for two people they returned to the living-room.

"I'm sorry to have spoiled your pleasure in your nice apartment, dear, but you know I always speak my mind. Well, you'll both know better next time and get some-

thing more suitable."

Like the house furnished in antiques that we're still paying rent on, Kathleen thought. *Oh, Lord, where am I going to get the courage to tell her?*

The coffee came, and with it came Rumania, Italy, and France. Mother went on talking long after the coffeepots were empty and cold, and Kathleen came to know first boredom and later panic as the clock moved on to post time. True, the important race was not till late in the afternoon, but suppose Johnny looked for her and she wasn't there? He was jumpy enough on the day of a big race, but when he came to the box and she was there with Mother—? That would be interesting for the spectators. Mother would leave them in no doubt that something was amiss with the Virginias. Still, Johnny was wise enough to take any cue that was thrown him, and Mother need not know till they were alone again that she had seen her son-in-law.

Kathleen smiled encouragingly. "I'm dying to hear more about it, Mother. But I'll have to get dressed now. I have such a treat in store for you. You came on the very best day you could have chosen. We're going out to the race track to see the big race."

"What!" Mother couldn't have been more amazed if Kathleen had jumped into a diver's outfit and said, "Let's have tea twenty-five feet under water."

"Everybody goes out to the race track here. Some people, I understand, go every day. But, of course, this is something special this afternoon. A fifty-thousand-dollar purse to the winner."

Mother looked shocked, and Kathleen could see her reducing the purse to grains of rice for the Chinese orphans. "I thought we'd talk, Kathleen—"

"Oh, we will, dear, we will. But, darling, I just have to see this race, and so do you. It's a very important thing here in Los Angeles."

Mother looked doubtful. "I could send for my trunk

and unpack while you're gone."

"Yes, you could. Would you prefer to do that?"

Mother considered. "No, I guess I'll go with you. After all, we've been separated for six months."

The very air that hung above the track seemed tinged with the sharp, electric crackle of excitement which rose from the clotted mass of humanity that pressed together trying to see, hoping to hear something of what transpired upon the fast, soft strip inside the rail. Forty thousand voices that could rise to a crashing crescendo or fall to a hushed whisper made the background music against which the drama of speed and endurance was played.

Here and there small pamphlets in green and pink proclaimed a trusting bettor who believed that a man somewhere really knew who was going to win and had philanthropically printed the news for all to read and profit by. The day was colored by those pamphlets, by the noises of cheers and the cries of popcorn vendors, by the odors of peanuts and hot dogs, by the feel of the charged and tingling atmosphere and the bitter taste of defeat and the glorious wine of victory.

Mother chattered brightly throughout the afternoon. She had never seen a horse race before and she was full of questions.

It was five o'clock, and the track was a deep, shadowy gold when the horses that the people had really come to see walked out upon the track. A great chorus of acclaim rose from the spectators. Medicine Man had drawn a good post position, and through the binoculars Kathleen could see Rickey McAvoy smiling contentedly as they paraded before the applauding crowd. She looked at the tote board. Odds on favorite, Medicine Man. She was proud of him, and of Johnny and of Rickey. But Johnny hadn't come to the box to watch the race. That meant only one thing. He had seen Mother and placed her

identity. He had not wanted to watch the race with her. They had other things to discuss later.

"Well, now, Kathleen, here's your big race. Whom are you going to bet on?"

"I'm not going to bet, Mother."

"What?"

"I came just to watch."

"I must say that's silly. Still, it's probably better than throwing away your money."

The horses were walking toward the post. Kathleen's eyes followed Medicine Man and Rickey. What a fine picture they made. The beautiful horse and the smiling boy in his bright silks. *If I could paint,* thought Kathleen.

Mother looked up at an airplane that was advertising some product in skywriting: *D–R–E–*

"Now, what's he trying to write?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Mother."

Mother laughed. "All right. Look at your old horses. I won't bother you again."

Kathleen didn't even hear her. The horses were at the gate now. Medicine Man had walked in like a lamb. Ah, what the papers would make of that! "When Medicine Man is carrying top weight he doesn't delay the start," they would say.

"And there they go!" The giant voice from the tower began to call the race, and Kathleen sat with clenched fists and her breath drawn so tightly that her chest ached. "It's Tiger Blue going to the front. Do Tell is second and Inception is third. High Rate is fourth, and Medicine Man."

Flash of colored silks in the sunlight; glimmering flanks of gallant horses and the illusion of terrific speed.

"Around the first turn it's Do Tell; High Rate is second, Inception is third," the loudspeaker said.

Through the binoculars, Kathleen could see Medicine Man holding his place easily, not yet ready to challenge

the leaders. Rickey looked thoroughly contented with the situation and she allowed herself to breathe again.

"Into the back stretch it's Do Tell by half a length. Inception is second by a head. High Rate is third by a length, and Medicine Man—"

"Get up there, baby," Kathleen whispered.

Mother turned and smiled at her. "Which baby do you want to win it, dear? They're all beautiful."

"Around the far turn it's Inception by a neck. High Rate is second by a length. Do Tell is third by half a length. Medicine Man is fourth."

"Come on, baby," Kathleen murmured between parted lips. Then to herself *Rickey, get up there. Please get up there.*

"At the head of the stretch it's Inception by half a length, and on the extreme outside here comes Medicine Man."

A mighty roar rose from the crowd as Medicine Man made his move. The steady, calm tone of the announcer was drowned in the yells of the mob.

"He's got it. It's in the bag," a voice behind Kathleen cried. And she knew it was true. He couldn't lose. Those strong, lithe legs were eating up the yards that stood between him and victory. Kathleen's breath came in a swift, surprising shock to her ears. She was screaming. But surely this once Johnny would forgive her for being carried away by Medicine Man's great charge. And at that moment the thing happened. Medicine Man seemed to plunge forward, his right front foot doubled under him, and he was down.

"He stumbled," somebody cried. "God! Is the boy dead? Did another horse kick him as the field went past?"

For Rickey McAvoy lay motionless on the track, his bright silks making a puddle of color on the soft loam. Medicine Man was standing now. He stood piteously on three legs, his fourth dangled horribly, and the bewilder-

ment on his face was tragic to see. The race was over. Somebody won. Kathleen never knew which horse it was, for she was running down the stairs, with Mother babbling in her ear and the sound of her own sobs accompanying the rain of words.

"Where are you going? You can't do anything for that poor horse, dear. And the boy, just a child, he's badly hurt, I'm afraid. Don't carry on so, dear. There's nothing we can do. Let me take you home."

"Mother, go away. I've got to get to the stables. How do you think Johnny feels? He loves Medicine Man. That horse is his life."

"Who's Johnny, dear?"

"My husband, of course."

"Darling, you're—"

A man came rushing up to them. "I have a car right here, Mrs. Virginia. Would you like to ride around to the stables?"

They drove to the stable area, Kathleen fighting her sobs all the way. *I must not go to him for comfort. He's the one who needs the comforting. Please, God, let me be able to help him. Let me know just what to say and do.*

She jumped out of the car. The horse ambulance was driving in with Medicine Man standing patiently on his three legs. Johnny came running from another car. There were tears running unashamedly down his face. She went at once to his side, but he paid no attention to her. Now there was only Medicine Man, who waited trustingly for whatever it was that Johnny thought best to do.

"Johnny, is there any way I can help?" Kathleen whispered.

He looked at her without seeing her. She was just a well-dressed stranger. "No, no, thanks." Then, "Sure. Go with Rickey to the hospital. See that he gets everything he needs."

"Are you going to stay here?" she asked gently.

"Yes. I'm going to stay here." His voice was savage and low-pitched. "My horse's leg is broken. I'm going to stay here and shoot him."

"Surely, Johnny, you needn't do that. If he must be destroyed someone else can—" She avoided looking at the poor animal, but it was almost worse to look at Johnny's tortured face.

"Sure, I can get someone to shoot him for me, and I suppose he can hire someone to die for him. He did everything I ever asked him to do. I said, 'Go out and run for me. I'll get a swell living out of it and you'll get nothing, and if you break your leg I'll have to shoot you.' Well, the least I can do for him is not pay someone to take the rap for me."

Kathleen felt the sobs rising in her throat again and she turned away. When she looked back the ambulance had moved on, and Johnny had gone to do the one thing that was left to do for the greatest horse in training. Medicine Man, with the soft eyes and the gentle manner. Johnny's big horse, who was brave and fleet and who had asked nothing but a caress in return for all he gave.

A stable hand looked at her, bit his lip, and made a circle in the dirt with the tip of his boot. "Mrs. Virginia, that boy is dead, that Rickey McAvoy."

"Oh, no."

"Yes, ma'am. You could see it when they brought him in. They took him down to some place where they'll keep him and send for his folks and everything."

Kathleen stood stunned in the fading California sunlight. Mother's arm was around her, her hand tenderly patting her shoulder and her voice murmuring words of comfort: "Poor baby, what an awful thing to happen. I'll take you home, baby."

"You go, Mother. I'll stay here with Johnny since there's nothing I can do for Rickey."

"Please come, baby. Your husband is upset—"

"Of course he's upset. That's why he needs me."

"But there's nothing you can do to help him, dear, and you needn't drain the cup of the last miserable dregs. You needn't see the shooting of the poor horse."

"Johnny wouldn't let me see that, Mother."

"Oh, I don't know. He seems pretty much set on doing as much suffering as possible. He isn't being very sensible, you know. After all—"

Kathleen lifted her eyes to her mother's face and stared straightly into it and waited for Mother to finish her sentence.

"After all, we have to make the best of our misfortunes, don't we?" Mother finished weakly.

"Yes." Kathleen was silent for a moment. Then: "Johnny bought a colt and they believed in each other, so Johnny taught the colt to run, and he became a horse that people had to respect, though they never respected Johnny. And then there was a kid that Johnny met at a fair grounds, and he taught the kid to ride the horse, and together the horse and the kid were great. And they died together, and you say Johnny isn't being very sensible. Would you like to go in, Mother, and sort of rationalize the situation for him?"

"Oh, Kathleen, you're letting your emotions tear you apart. Where's my good, intelligent girl gone?"

"I'm not sure you ever had one, Mother."

Through the soft, yellow haze came the high, sweet notes of the bugle calling the horses for the last race. The call came sadly to the ears of Kathleen, dolefully, a minor key that wept for Rickey McAvoy and Medicine Man, who would go to the winner's circle no more. There were other horses and other boys to answer that bugle. There would always be horses to run and boys to ride them, but for Johnny there would never again be a horse like Medicine Man. For Rickey's girl there would never be another Rickey.

Died—Rickey McAvoy, aged twenty-four, and Medicine Man, gallant son of Tribal Custom.

A swipe strolled past them. "It's done," he said casually. "Mr. Virginia gave it to the horse."

And Kathleen felt her legs buckle under her, and very quietly she fainted dead away.

It was nighttime now in the beautiful apartment that had no kitchen. Kathleen lay weakly back against the satin cushions of her chaise longue and listened to Mother's voice run on and on. She felt that she had been hearing the voice through endless years of cold, helpless agony.

"Apparently, from his appearance and the business that he's in, he's a man of the world, and he certainly should never have married you till you'd had time to think it all out and consult me. He took advantage of your inexperience. I'm not blaming you at all, baby. He obviously swept you right off your feet."

"I should have waited at the barns for him," Kathleen said dully. "He needed me."

"How could you wait? Poor child, you'd just had more than you could bear and you fainted dead away. It was no wonder, with everybody making the worst of everything. Death is sad, but people with good sense take it calmly."

Yes, Kathleen knew that Mother always accepted the death of her friends with quiet intelligence. Mother's friends died politely. They never left memories behind them like Medicine Man and Rickey left. The horse standing uncomplainingly on his three legs. The little red-haired man lying on the track and the field sweeping past him.

"I just dumped you into a car and someone, an utter stranger to me, drove us home. Really, this is the worst day I've ever lived through."

Kathleen moved restlessly on the chaise longue.

Johnny had no way of knowing she had fainted; he would think she had gone away and left him alone with his anguish. Once he knew that there was nothing she could do for Rickey, then he would know that she had gone home. He had seen Mother in the box and he would draw his own conclusions. He would say to himself, "Her mother told her to come away from such nasty goings-on, and she went." Kathleen's eyes turned to the clock. Where was he? Where was he?

The messenger she had sent to the barns came back with the meager information he had gathered from Johnny's stable hands. Mr. Virginia had left the race track soon after he had destroyed Medicine Man. No one knew where he had gone.

The hours dragged on. Mother yawned and spoke again of the rigors of the day.

"You can go to bed, Mother."

"And leave you alone? I should say not. At least, I can divert your thoughts a little."

"I'm all right. You go ahead."

"Do you have a sleeping-pill, Kathleen? It would do you good to get a nice, long rest."

Kathleen had no sleeping-pill.

"Has your husband stayed out late like this before?"

"Of course not, Mother. Don't you see that today has been different from any other day? Our life together hasn't been a series of violent deaths and agonizing grief. Johnny's world went to pieces today, and I wasn't there to help put it together."

"Well, he knows where you are if he wants you. It doesn't seem to me that he's giving you much consideration. After all, you were unhappy about it, too, and he doesn't know that you have someone here to comfort you."

"Yes, he does, Mother. We've been expecting you to come and he saw you there today. He would have no trouble guessing your identity."

"Then that's all the more reason for his coming home. Unless he's putting off meeting me."

"You don't know Johnny. He's not afraid of you, Mother."

"Heavens, I should hope not! I don't want anyone to be afraid of me. But he certainly must know that he had a lot of explaining to do and he probably doesn't feel up to it. Now, you see, if you had married Martin—"

"But I didn't, did I? I married Johnny Virginia. He's my husband. He's alone somewhere and he's miserably unhappy, and I should be with him, wherever he is."

"When he wants you, he knows where to find you," Mother said smugly.

Kathleen buried her face in the pillow and lay there trembling with the torment of all that the day had put upon her. The grief, the fear for Johnny, the exquisite torture of Mother's steady prattle. She felt that never again would she cease trembling or know how to control the movements of her limbs, but when there was a footstep in the hall she leaped from the chaise longue and ran toward the door.

"What is it, dear?" Mother asked, padding swiftly after her.

They were standing in the square white foyer when Johnny opened the door. Kathleen was a few feet in front of Mother, who hung back as though she were ridiculously expecting her daughter to call her forward for a neat, quite correct introduction.

"Johnny, I've been so worried." Kathleen's arms went about him, but he stood rigidly just inside the door looking over her shoulder at the plump, tailor-suited lady who had moved into his home.

"You're Kathleen's mother?"

"Yes, I am."

"Well, let's all go in and have a heart-to-heart talk."

Kathleen understood that tone and the sardonic heaviness of his words. She knew now that her surmise had

been correct. He read her disappearance from the barns to mean that she had cleared out when Mother had given the word.

Oh, God, if she starts lecturing him—

But Mother prided herself on having a good, working knowledge of practical psychology. "I want to tell you how terribly sorry I am for the accident," she began.

"Thanks."

"Of course, when it happened, I didn't know how it could affect Kathleen." Mother smiled faintly. "I had been kept rather in the dark about my little girl's marriage."

"Yeah, I wanted it that way," Johnny said.

Kathleen felt her face grow hot as he looked at her.

"Well, I think it was a beastly trick all around," Mother said, "and you might as well know that I don't blame Kathleen for any part of it. However," she added, suddenly remembering her psychology, "we won't discuss that now. You've had enough trouble for one day." She smiled sympathetically at Johnny. One must always appear understanding if one wants to get anywhere in a difficult situation.

Kathleen said, "I think we've all had enough for one day." She switched off a lamp to suggest adjournment. It would be something to be alone with Johnny, to cling to him and make him see that she had not meant to desert him.

"Oh, that reminds me," Mother said, still smiling. "I'm afraid I've robbed you of your room. Kathleen said I could borrow it, and so I have."

"Sure, you take it. I guess it was always sitting around waiting for you, anyhow."

"Johnny!" Kathleen put out her hand to him. "Please don't say any more until you understand about today."

"I understand. You couldn't go to the hospital, because they never took the poor kid there. So you came home."

"Johnny, I'm desperately ashamed of myself, but I—I guess I couldn't take it. I fainted—"

"Well, you came to, didn't you?"

"I tried to find you—"

"But you didn't try where I was, did you? You didn't look for me where they'd taken Rickey. Where the hell else did you think I'd be?" He looked from one woman to the other, but neither met his eyes, and he said, "Oh, I get it. You thought I was out somewhere getting drunk, drowning my sorrows."

"I didn't think you were getting drunk, Johnny. I'm just ashamed of myself for not guessing where you were. That's where you'd have to be, of course."

"And you, baby, were in no condition to go there," Mother put in. "Even if you'd thought of it. What possible good could you do that poor jockey by crying and carrying on and making a nervous wreck of yourself?"

Johnny's eyes fell with sudden interest upon the brisk, sensible woman who happened to be his mother-in-law. "No, she couldn't do any good," he said after a moment. "You're absolutely right. She's only good when the going's easy, when her job is to be decorative and sweet and merry, but, let the real running start, and she's not worth a tinker's damn. Well, let me tell you something—the going's going to be tough from now on, and I don't know of any better time than right now to declare her out."

Kathleen's heart faltered in its beat as she looked at the dark, intense face of Johnny Virginia. "You don't mean that, Johnny. You're talking wildly because your nerves are jangled and you can't see things clearly tonight."

"I mean it, all right. There's no spot for you where we go from here. No more big purses, no more sitting in the lap of luxury. From here out it's playing strictly with white chips, and damn' few of them."

Mother cleared her throat and said, "I know nothing about these things, but, purely from a business angle, isn't there insurance for race horses? Didn't you have insur—?"

"Certainly, and with the money I'll just go out and buy another horse, exactly like Medicine Man. Do you know who has one for sale?"

"Let's stop this talking, please," Kathleen begged. "In the morning—"

"Sure, let's go to sleep. Maybe you can—" He fell silent for a moment, and she knew that he was remembering Medicine Man's trusting eyes and the confident smile of Rickey McAvoy.

She wanted to scream, "I can't sleep any more than you can. I just want to be alone with you, to make you understand, to convince you that I'll run with you in the toughest going and never whimper."

She turned to her mother. "Mother," she said, "would you mind leaving us for just a moment? There are so many things I want to say to Johnny."

But Johnny was on his feet before Mother could raise her plumpness from the deep, billowing chair. He walked to Kathleen, and suddenly he was the stranger on the train whom she could love but stake no claim upon. He kissed her briefly, waved a careless farewell to Mother, and walked toward the door.

"Johnny!" Kathleen was flying into the hall, her negligee waving its chiffon folds in the draft that rose through the stair well. "Johnny! Come back! Johnny!"

Mother drew her gently into the apartment, with the reminder that she couldn't run half-naked through the streets of Los Angeles. "And all that screaming after him. Darling, you do have neighbors."

For a time Kathleen sat stunned and almost motionless in the apartment, replying automatically to Mother's casual remarks, learning not to hear when Mother spoke

of Johnny. There were thoughts that came to her as she sat there: Johnny didn't want her. He had never really wanted her. But those pictures she had made for him had overcome his better judgment. He had known all along that she would prove extra, unnecessary weight, but when the going was easy he could carry it. Now that things had changed there was no room for a girl who cried and fainted and had a head full of ideals that Johnny couldn't afford. She could only complicate that existence of his, so full of sudden changes. When life was sweet with victory she joined the newspapers in questioning and criticizing his methods. In bleak days of trouble he would not know what to do with a wife who had never lived on her nerve, who had never owed rent or walked into a pawnshop. He couldn't want her. Millstone. He'd been right about that.

Kathleen read the nice, sympathetic speeches of Johnny's enemies in the morning paper, and wondered if one among them would have had what it took to free the horse from his misery as Johnny had done. And presently she began to think about the dark stranger she had married, and she knew that all the men she would meet in all the years to come would be only shadowy figures, half alive, half formed.

But Johnny didn't want her. She had failed him when he needed her and had shown herself to be just what he could not use in his hazardous, unstable career. Perhaps somewhere there was a woman who could ride to the crest of the hill with him and take the downgrades without fainting.

And she was still sitting, crushed and unable to rise above the blow that had been dealt her, when the papers were giving the last follow-up on the accident. The photograph of Johnny at the grave of Rickey McAvoy. *Last bugle blows for plucky rider,* she read. *Johnny Virginia attends services for jockey who rode many winners.*

They had taken Rickey back to the Midwestern town

where Johnny had found him, and Kathleen saw in the picture the friends who must have often bragged of knowing him; his mother, who had been proud of her runt, for somehow he had had the soul of a giant. And she wept at the sight of Johnny beside that grave, for she was remembering the times he had stood in the paddock giving a last word of encouragement to Rickey, a last pat on the shoulder for good luck.

Mother looked across at her and said, "Really, Kathleen, you must try to be a little more cheerful. I know you've been through a lot, but—"

"I haven't been through a lot. I had six of the happiest months any woman ever knew."

Mother shook her head. "Daughter, you're confused. Happiness is deeper than living easy and having everything money can buy. Why, I saw a woman in a hut in Portugal. She'd never had anything but hard work and the bare necessities. Yet upon her face was the mark of true happiness."

"You know what put it there, Mother? Not hard work, not privation, not any damn' nonsense about simplicity, but just this: She had the man she wanted. That's the only thing that makes a woman happy."

Mother glanced uneasily at the photograph of Johnny Virginia that stared up at her from the morning paper. "He must be a hypnotist," she remarked acidly.

Kathleen did not answer. How could you explain that happiness was when your heart thumped at a smile from a man who smiled too rarely? That it was walking into a room with him and feeling proud of being at his side? That it was hearing him speak, sharing his dreams, feeling his arms around you? When these things were gone, then death had come. Even though you ate and drank and answered questions, you were dead if you had had such ecstasy and it was gone.

"You ought to stir about a little," Mother said. "Do things. See people."

Kathleen looked at her.

"Martin?" she asked.

Mother colored slightly and fiddled with the lamp chain. "Martin's a good friend, Kathleen. You know what I'd hoped, but, if that's impossible, he can be our friend, can't he?"

"He could, but why should he have to stick his neck out a second time? No, let's leave him as he is, Mother."

"My goodness, Kathleen, Martin could be perfectly unsentimental. I'm sure everyone doesn't think in terms of getting the man or woman he wants. Some people appreciate friendship and the more spiritual things in life."

"You mean they take them as a last resort."

Mother glanced again at the photograph of Johnny Virginia and marched out of the room. Presently she marched back in again. "I've come to a decision," she said. "Just as soon as I can pack and get the tickets I'm going East, and you're going with me."

Kathleen nodded, and Mother was taken aback at such unexpected docility. "Do you mean that, baby? Will you really go?"

"Will I go where, Mother?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Kathleen! East. New York. Will you go?"

"I suppose so, Mother."

Mother sighed. "Look, baby, will you come for a little walk?"

"I don't think so, Mother. Do you mind?"

Kathleen didn't know when Mother left the apartment or notice when she came back. There was so much to think about. Mother had said something about going East. What would that be like? To be somewhere where Johnny couldn't find you if he wanted to. To be remembering forever that he didn't want to find you. What was the difference between her and a woman whom he could be sure would take to the tough going? The real

fundamental difference? And suppose she discovered? Suppose she thought and thought, and finally said to herself, "Ah, yes, that's it." Then what?

Johnny didn't want her. That fact was very plain. To chase after him, to plead with him, wasn't the sort of thing a woman did. Although, come to think of it, perhaps it was. Maybe only empty, brittle blondes who couldn't take the hard turns gracefully, who were wrapped in cellophane, were afraid to say, "All my life will be miserable without you. Give me a chance to go where you go, and I'll show you that I can take it." Perhaps pride was the pretty bow placed on the cellophane as a finishing touch to a package that held a damned unimportant gift.

And she ate the dinner that Mother brought her, but Kathleen's eyes were fixed on a space two feet above Mother's head and she didn't seem to know she was eating at all.

"I've thought it all out," Mother said to her. "Every part of the book. I'll start with Bucharest, because I loved Bucharest. You can help me tremendously, Kathleen; there'll be no end of research we can do together. It'll keep us busy."

Kathleen nodded.

"It'll be fun, dear, it really will," Mother said. "And, of course, there are the royalties. I mean money, you know, not the ruling houses."

Mother retired early that evening. Tomorrow would be a day of packing and making arrangements for the trip East. Plane, did Kathleen think, or train? Maybe a boat through the canal. Or, no, the quickest thing out. The first accommodations offered, even if it was a bus. Mother was frank to admit she'd had enough of Los Angeles.

Kathleen sat in the living-room long after Mother had gone to bed, and when the air was damp and chill in the dark California morning hours, she put on a warm

coat and went out to strip the last shred of cellophane off the girl who had stepped on a westbound train.

He hardly turned his head as she approached, but he knew that it was she. "Oh, hello," he said.

"Hello, Johnny."

He was standing at the rail with a stop watch in his hand. His eyes were squinted, staring through the blue shadows at a horse and rider that seemed gigantic, black figures against the sky. "What do you want?"

"I want to tell you that you've had me wrong. That I want to go with you wherever you're going; that I'll take the bad with the good, and never cry if only I'm with you."

He looked at the stop watch and frowned out at the horse and rider. "Take him back to the three-quarter pole," he yelled at the rider.

"Johnny, I love you. I don't care what's ahead for us, if only—"

"See that horse? He's a plater. If I'm lucky, he and the few others I've got will get me a fifteen-hundred-dollar purse once in a while. Occasionally, a thousand-dollar one, but more often the purse'll be about seven hundred bucks. And that isn't every week, you know. It'll be few and far between."

"I don't care, Johnny."

"Oh, you don't? You don't care about owing bills and living in cheap hotels and having last year's things to wear and—"

"No, I don't, darling."

"That's a laugh. Didn't your mother ever tell you anything? Don't you know that a man gets tough to live with when he's broke, that he gets mean and small-minded and wants to fight all the time? Suppose I don't win any purses with these platers? You'd be a help, wouldn't you? I can see you being shamed to tears at the places we'd live, at the people I'd brace for a loan, at the

things I'd do. I'd hate your damned delicacy so much that I'd kill you."

He paused, and she knew that he was remembering the gypsy horse trader who had killed his wife for proving herself less noble than a mare. He was remembering the house with the antiques. The days they had spent there with Rickey. The stop watch clicked. Johnny glanced at it, and called to the exercise boy, "Cool him out."

"Johnny, I—"

"Oh, go home, will you?"

His black eyes blazed as he looked at her. "I'm working—can't you see that? I'm busy. Cripes, don't you have any sense? Make me tell you the truth. All right, then, I will. I'd never intended to take you to Saratoga. I couldn't take you to Saratoga. We had to be quits before I got there."

She stood staring up into his angry face. "Tell me why you couldn't take me to Saratoga."

"Because of a damn' good reason. I have a home in Saratoga, and somebody in it. Do you see now?"

She nodded her head solemnly, but her heart had taken a sudden, wild leap of hope. "You love her, Johnny? Better than you love me?"

"I wasn't tired of her in six months like I am of you."

"I understand everything now, Johnny. It's all right. Don't mind about anything. I won't bother you any more." She stood staring into the blue shadows. "I see your money difficulties, too. Medicine Man's insurance won't keep that Saratoga woman forever, will it?"

He lit a cigarette and flipped the match away from him. "I owe that to a gambling house," he said. "So what?"

"So nothing, Johnny—only, that I'd like to ask who's wearing the old school tie now. Who's got a damn' silly head full of collegian ideals?"

His eyes were hard. "What do you mean?"

"I mean you. A woman in Saratoga! Johnny, heroics like that are worthy of the kindergarten. Trying to make me run out on you because you're broke. You can't do it, darling. Trying to sluff me off on Mother, who'll be kind to me, give me a good home, and in time find me another Martin. You can't do it."

He drew deeply upon his cigarette and turned away from her. "Go on home," he murmured.

"You're such a fool to torture yourself when we were so happy together."

"We were happy in the big money. Things are different—"

"We were happy because we had each other. Can't you see that?" She grasped his shoulders and tried to make him look at her. He must see that this moment was terribly real and important. Upon it hung all the moments in all the years to come.

"You don't know what it's like to be broke," he said. His eyes were sick with remembering, his voice bitter with memories she could never share.

"Yes, I do. It makes you learn to do the toughest things and like it. It makes you brave and more able than the next fellow. It makes you understand how other people think and feel. It makes you big enough to do things like turning Medicine Man's insurance money over to Rickey McAvoy's mother."

"Who ever said—?"

"Not a soul, Johnny, and no one will ever say it again. I just worked it out on the 'where-the-hell-else-would-I-be' principle. I know there are things you just wouldn't do. I've really gotten to know you."

"Maybe you have. But I'm still wondering about you. Don't you know that well-brought-up girls don't come chasing after men who have deserted them? It simply isn't done."

"But I did it, Johnny."

"Yeah," he sighed. "I'm licked. Come on, headache,

where do we go from here?" And, as he stooped to kiss her, she saw that suddenly he wasn't a stranger.

The Virginias were back in their box at the race track. People noticed and whispered. It was the first time they'd been there since the day Johnny Virginia's horse and rider were killed. They had taken it to heart, too. They looked different. Not that they weren't always unfriendly and solemn-faced, but they looked like people who had been hit with a hammer and were just regaining consciousness. They still held hands and talked quietly together, each listening to the other with the rapt attention that everyone had noticed. The new thing about them was the way that Mrs. Virginia looked older. Not less attractive, but more thoughtful, and the way Johnny kept studying the racing form. There had been little change in him. It was only when Voodoo Chief, half brother of Medicine Man, walked out upon the track that people noticed he wasn't looking.

"There's nothing wrong with them that a few winners wouldn't cure," people in the know whispered together. "When that horse fell down, it took fifty thousand dollars with it that Johnny was counting on. He wasn't smart enough to beat that race. Old Lady Luck handed him an Ace of Spades for a change. Maybe it'll do him good."

"I don't know. He's not a bad guy. There was a day in Florida he staked me when I was awful hard up."

"Who? Virginia? Cripes, I thought he had ice water instead of blood."

The others turned to look in amazement at one of their group who had seen a softer Johnny Virginia than anyone knew existed.

"Yeah. He staked me. I just walked up and braced him for a hundred fish. He didn't ask a question, just handed it over. He's seen me a million times since and always says 'Hi' but never stops to talk. Don't seem to

want his dough back, either. I owed a feed bill and room rent. I'd never have gotten out if it hadn't been for Johnny Virginia."

"Well, he knew you were another trainer just like himself."

"Yeah? That's really a compliment. When I get results like Virginia—"

The old trainer stood staring up at the box where the Virginias sat. "I oughtn't to tell him," he murmured. "Why should I be so damned generous? I've got a dozen friends and I can't tell them all, but, gee, he sure was swell in Florida."

And after a while he walked up the steps and down the passageway and stood in front of the box where Johnny Virginia sat with the pretty girl he had married. "Hello, Virginia; remember me? Hialeah Park? The day Hamilton rode Dusky Belle?"

Johnny Virginia nodded. "I remember," he said briefly.

"I remember, too," the trainer said. "Look, Virginia. Put your ear down a minute."

"I'm using it up here," Johnny told him.

"I want to give you something you'll never get unless I give it to you."

Johnny bent toward him. "In the fifth race, there's a horse named Rifleman," the trainer whispered. "He's mine. I'm dropping him into a forty-five-hundred-dollar claiming race and he's going to walk in. He's handicap material, but no one knows what his workouts have been. He doesn't belong with that bunch of bums, but no one knows it except me and you. The horse'll be a good price and he'll win in a gallop. Get your bet down."

"Thanks," Johnny said.

"Debt squared?" asked the other anxiously.

"Too early to say."

"As God is my judge, Virginia, it's in the bag. The workouts have left the track sizzling. See you later."

The trainer moved with the crowd that passed the box on its continual move to and from the betting machines. Johnny turned to Kathleen. "Give me your ring," he said quietly. He glanced at the clock on the tote board. "Fifth race. Sure I can make it. Put your hand down between the chairs and I'll slide the ring off. . . . There, I've got it. You don't mind, do you?"

"Of course not, Johnny."

"You'll have another one just like it some day."

"It doesn't matter, Johnny."

"It doesn't, eh? Say, you know, your nonchalance can go too far."

She laughed and watched him hurry away. "Don't be long," she whispered as he melted into the crowd.

He was back in little more than an hour. The horses were at the post for the fifth race when he slid into the chair beside her. She looked at him inquiringly.

"I got the bet down," he said.

"Oh, then it's all right."

"Is it? Let's wait till the race is run and we'll know more about that."

"And there they go." The big voice from the tower boomed, and Johnny's eyes fastened themselves upon a flash of brown darting away from the rest of the pack like an arrow leaving the bow.

"It's Rifleman, by three lengths—Carry On is second—"

During the last thirty seconds of the race Kathleen allowed her eyes to wander from the big bay colt that came easily, almost disdainfully, around the turn and made for home with a graceful, galloping motion that said to the horses behind him, "See? I'm not even trying." She looked at Johnny. His glance was fixed on the colt, and upon his face was that infrequent smile of his.

"It's Rifleman by ten lengths—"

She turned to Johnny: "Well, darling, I guess he won it."

"Yes. Did you see how he ran? Did you notice his

stride? God, what a colt! When he has a few more pounds on him and someone to show him how to—"

"Johnny!"

"What's the matter?"

"You didn't claim him?"

"Why not? He was in a claiming race, wasn't he?"

"But he was safe in there because no one knew how good he was. It was only through the kindness of his trainer's heart that you found out what sort of a horse he was. That isn't square, Johnny; that isn't—"

"The trainer stuck him down in class to make a killing, didn't he? That wasn't square, either. That was being smart. Well, if a smarter guy claims the horse out, that's just life, isn't it?"

"But, Johnny—"

He pointed out toward the track, where Rifleman stood in the winner's circle, breathing lightly, unwearied by what had been no contest at all for him.

"There," Johnny said, "is our new handicap threat, but there's months of work ahead, and, at the end of it, who knows?"

A pot of gold or a heartbreak lay at the end of the rainbow. But whatever it was they'd find it together. She was married to the too clever Mr. Virginia and she was glad of it. That was the something in marriage which made people satisfied to live together day in and day out, world without end, the knowledge that, come what may, you could stand shoulder to shoulder against the world. Maybe that was the "spiritual side" that Mother had spoken about. Kathleen doubted it. What would Mother know of a finger that felt peculiar because it was missing a ring? What would she know of planning a future that had no security, no promise of peace and everlasting calm?

"Well," Johnny said, "I'm going back to the barn. Want to come?" His voice throbbed with the anticipa-

tion of the adventure ahead of him. The meeting with Rifleman, the placing of his hands upon those warm, glowing flanks, the growing kinship with the horse, the coming, in time, to know his peculiarities.

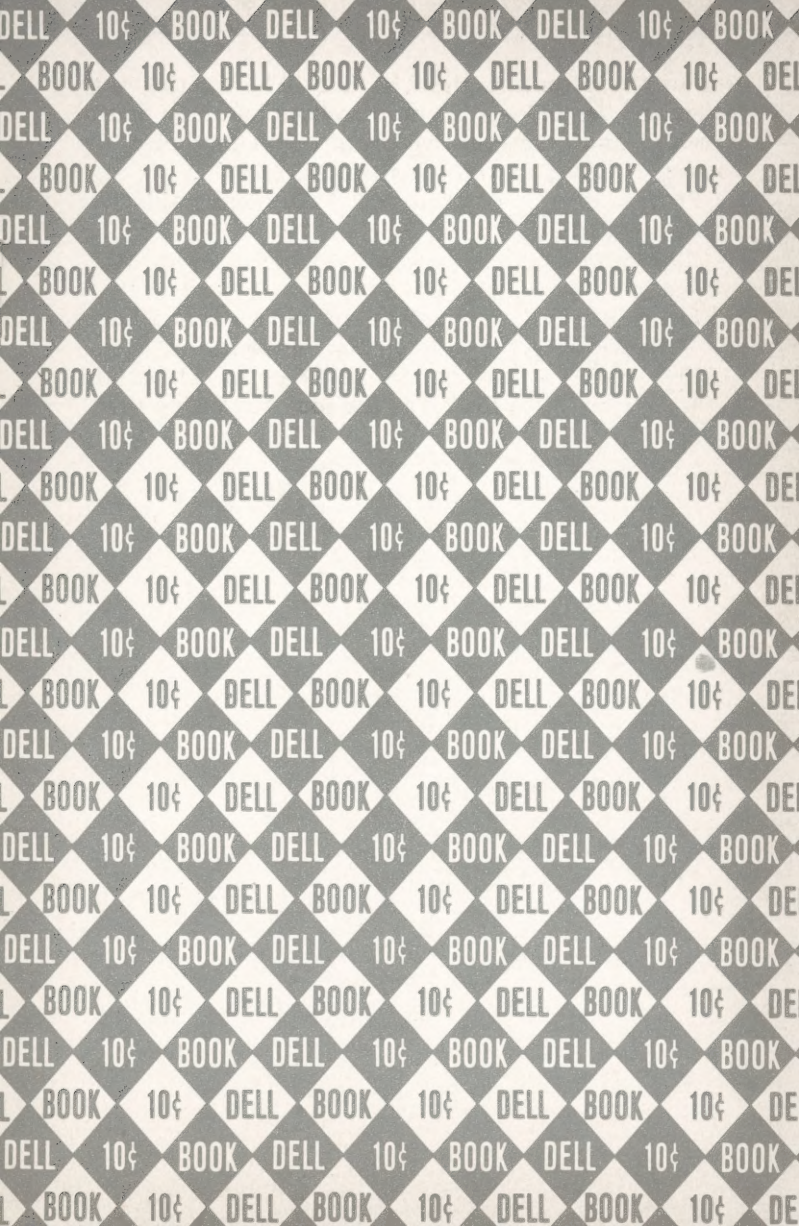
"Better cash your tickets first," Kathleen said. "He was ten to one; we ought to—"

"Kathleen."

"Yes."

"Look, I never thought about the bet. I was in a hurry and— But we've got the horse, haven't we?"

"Yes, dear. We have the horse. Come on, clever Mr. Virginia. Let's go to the barns and look our future over."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